The title of this editorial is taken from 1 Chronicles 29:15: “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.” The words are those of David. From the context we learn that he had reigned over Israel for forty years. He was an old man who had lived a hard life during those forty years. His death was imminent, and it was time for him to abdicate the throne of Israel in favor of his son Solomon.

1 Chronicles 29 records David’s speech to Israel on the occasion of the transfer of power to Solomon, who had already been anointed as Israel’s next king.

A more wonderful and God-centered speech is difficult to find in scripture. Listen to David:

Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Thine O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee and praise thy glorious name (1 Chron. 29:10–13).
Then in verse 14 David puts himself and his people in the proper relation to the sovereign God: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.” He refers to all the riches that had been gathered in preparation for the building of the temple. All things are God’s, and David and Israel are only giving back to God what was his.

In verse 15 David gives the reason for what he has just said: “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners.” His meaning is that our lives and all our possessions are not our own. The riches of this world and life itself are not permanent, but transient. The reason is that we are strangers and sojourners; “our days on the earth are as a shadow.” We are familiar with David’s comparison: a shadow is here one minute and gone the next. David speaks similar language in Psalm 39:12: “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.”

It is noteworthy that David speaks of all the fathers. In Psalm 39:12 he speaks as an individual: all my fathers. In 1 Chronicles 29:15 he includes all God’s people: all our fathers. David’s point is that all his fathers may have been (and were) different from one another in most ways—the time, place, and circumstances in which they lived, their characters, their history, and their deeds. But the one thing they all had in common was that they were strangers and sojourners in the world.

It is appropriate to cite from scripture a couple of examples of these fathers or ancestors.

The outstanding example of these fathers was the patriarch Abraham, a stranger and sojourner in Canaan. Because God had blessed him richly, he was a wealthy and powerful man in the land. The sons of Heth, co-inhabitants of the land, recognized this fact when Abraham’s beloved wife Sarah passed away. Abraham needed a place to bury her, which was a problem, since he did not own any of the land of Canaan, but was a pilgrim and a transient in it. He approached the sons of Heth, who must have owned some of the land, in an effort to buy such a place—specifically Ephron the Hittite. The sons of Heth attempted to give Abraham what he wanted, saying, “Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchers bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sep-

ulcher, but that thou mayest bury thy dead” (Gen. 23:6). But Abraham refused the offer and insisted on purchasing the cave of Machpelah as his burial ground.

Why did he do this? Because he was a stranger and a sojourner in the land. God had promised to give him and his descendants the land, and he had to wait for God to fulfill that promise. He could not receive the land from anyone who owned any of it, as he says in Genesis 23:4. Therefore he had to purchase what he needed. Abraham never owned one square foot of Canaan except for this small burying plot.

Similar to Abraham’s words were the words of Jacob to Pharaoh after Jacob had moved to Egypt. When Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was, Jacob responded, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage” (Gen. 47:9). Notice that he uses the word pilgrimage twice. He thereby confessed before Pharaoh that he was a pilgrim, a stranger and sojourner in the world. Even as he speaks, he is in Egypt, a pilgrim in a strange land.

Coming closer to home, many of our forefathers came to America from Europe, especially from the Lowlands. They came from the known to the unknown. From the viewpoint of their earthly lives, they were strangers in a strange land. Almost everything was different from what they had known—the language, the customs, the food, the work environment, and the church.

But more importantly, they were strangers and sojourners spiritually. They immigrated for many earthly considerations, but they came especially for the sake of the preservation of the truth, which was being compromised in their former homes. Their legacy is the Reformed and Presbyterian truth that we hold and love today.

So, young people, what is the point of all this history, both biblical and regarding our more recent history?

It is this: the truth is a unity. The same truth that Abraham, Jacob, and David confessed and lived is ours today.

It is also this: the faith of the scriptures is a unity. With Abraham, Jacob, and David, we believe that this world is not our home, but we are strangers and sojourners in the world.
And it is this: our purpose in this world is to live the Christian life to God’s glory. You are the next generation of the church, and you must know how to live that Christian life. All our fathers are our example how to do this. they show us the way to heaven, and we must follow in their footsteps. All our fathers are therefore also our incentive to live as strangers and sojourners. As it were, they beckon to us from heaven to come and join them.

Young people, take a lesson from all our fathers. Their lives and history are written for our instruction.

June 21 is Father’s Day. While it is a Hallmark holiday, it is appropriate to note its occurrence in a Christian context. In this issue Beacon Lights does this with a twist, celebrating not fathers, but fathers-in-law. From the fertile and practical mind of Ray Ezinga, life-long member and often office-bearer in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church, comes his unusual letter that appears in the context of Fathers’ Day.

A few words of explanation are in order.

Recently Ray called me to let me know that in the course of disposing the earthly goods of a relative of his wife who had passed away, they encountered the letter that appears in this issue. Ray had forgotten that he had written it in 1991, but upon its discovery he wondered if it was suitable for publication. He read it to me over the phone (which brought tears to my eyes) and I quickly decided that it was worthy of publication.

The father-in-law to whom Ray writes is John Hagar, a solidly Reformed man (also raiser of goats and a gardener) who was the father of Ray’s beloved wife Jean, who passed away in 2014. As is evident from the first paragraphs of the letter, Ray went to Michigan from Colorado to visit his relatives, but there was apparently a mix-up as to the dates on the timing of his visiting his father-in-law. Following his return home, Ray wrote this letter to his father-in-law.

Young people, take a lesson from what this wise saint writes. Choose well. It matters!

Any organizations make a distinction between active members and members who merely give their financial support. The active members participate in the activities of the organization; the others are mere hangers-on. The active members are actual members because they exert themselves to attain the objectives of the organization. Those who quit themselves of responsibility by paying may be called members, but they are not actually that.

A twofold relationship such as that is possible in a society because a society is not a body, an organism. But a relationship such as that is not possible within the church of Christ, because the church is depicted to us in the scriptures as a body. It is a body not made by human hands, but created by the Lord.
our God. We are the members of that body. It is that truth that the apostles constantly try to weave into our consciousness, and it is especially that truth that the apostle Paul exposes to us in 1 Corinthians 12. Your relationship to the church can be a true one only if you think of that church as a body and of yourself as a living member of it, as you will always remain a living member of it.

A conception such as that enables you to appreciate that the several members can be different, that one member of the church can possess an individuality differing from that of another, and that each member has a function to perform that is peculiar to himself. Your body has many members—eyes and ears, feet and hands—and each of these serves the body differently. Jesus’ apostle tells us that it is thus also among the members of the church. So far from resembling each other as do two drops of water, he tells us, the several members differ among each other and vary greatly. Such is the body of Christ, not because we have spoiled it by our willfulness, but because God has ordained that it should be so. The apostle says: “But God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

These facts are being said about what our fathers called the invisible church, the mystical body of Christ, and not of the external, visible church. Who would say of his relationship to the visible church: “I am and eternally will remain a member of it.” The church on earth has many members whom God has never set in the body. There are thousands, millions, who have never performed any function for the mystical body as members of the visible church. Yet you may not think of the visible church as an organism that is quite disassociated from the invisible church, as though the former stood beside the latter, as though you could do as you pleased with the visible church, and do so with impunity. An illustration will elucidate what is meant. You are raising peas in your garden. You know very well that you want the peas, not the pod. Yet you do not tell your gardener, “You must tend the peas, but you may ignore the pod.” True, when the peas are ripe, and picking time has come, you shell the peas and throw the pod away. Similarly, you remove a scaffolding when once a building has been completed within it. Similarly the Lord God will sometime come to throw away the visible church. But the present is not yet the season of harvest. The scaffolding is necessary still, and the pod must remain. And pod and scaffolding must be protected: the visible church must be preserved. Hence, you may not be indifferent about the visible church, wrongly supposing that the invisible, spiritual church can mature without her. Remember that the invisible church is contained within the visible, and that the invisible church flourishes only when the visible grows.

Never yield therefore to that spiritual greed by which so many, because they suppose their own soul secure, become indifferent to the welfare of the invisible church. Whoever thinks that way supposes himself to be wiser than God, who gave us the visible church. Essentially the attitude of a man such as that represents sheer arrogance and pride. These are sins that inevitably are punished, be they ever so skillfully subtilized. A sheltered spirituality is false. Every child of God is by his confession obliged to join the true church of God. The trueness of the church can be determined from the purity of her confession, by her purged administration of the word and of the sacraments, and by her maintenance of Christian discipline. Never say therefore: “I am a living member of the invisible church, and besides, I have joined the visible church.” By such a confession you put asunder what God has joined together. You separate the soul from its external body. By it you suppose that two kinds of life obtain: the one a spiritual life, which is lived for God; the other a life that accrues to you from your membership in an external organization, a life really external to holy things. It is from heresies such as these that the wicked custom of receiving members into the church arises, a custom according to which the sole objective is to support an external scaffolding of the church, and which cares not at all about spiritual, godly essences.

If you are to prosper spiritually, you must at the time of your public confession begin to take an active part in the life of the visible church. The body of Christ has room only for active members. Hence he who is passive and indolent in the affairs of the church is courting a lie and raises reasons to suspect that he is not a member of the body, even though his name is enrolled on the records. The fact that you are young does not excuse you from active participation, for by your public confession you asserted that you had outgrown childish things and that you had attained an age of discretion. Nor may you plead that you are so insignificant that your contribution can be of no avail. The apostle Paul has
clearly pointed out that the least significant members of the body do have a function to perform. Hence there is no comfort in pleading one’s insignificance as an excuse for indolence. The apostle pleads for co-operation between all members in order “that there be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25). You were born within the church, you were baptized within it, and you lived in it many years. But you perhaps never stopped to reckon what active participation in the life of the church really meant. At the time of your confession you must become responsible in this matter. After your confession it is most obligatory that you ask what such participation demands of you in the name of the Lord.

Real participation in the life of the church asks many and various things of you.

First, it demands that you avert shame and reproach from the church by maintaining a goodly conduct. Next, you must insist that you and your family make constant use of the church, and you strive to obtain spiritual nourishment, spiritual exercise, and spiritual enrichment. You must insist upon that because you know that the body is healthiest when the constituent members are vigorous and strong.

But these are not the only demands. You must also support and sustain others, be patient and longsuffering toward them, and strengthen them spiritually. This does not mean that you must assume the duties of the pastor. That would be arrogance, and you must be motivated solely by your love for the body of Christ, a love that seeks not itself. For whom then should you provide? That question is easily answered. You may not imitate Cain by saying, “Am I my brother’s keeper? Let him see to his own affairs; they are none of mine.” Cain blasphemed with those words, but a child of God does not. The child of God knows who his neighbors are. True, you may also go into the highways and byways and seek out and help the unfortunate. It is blessed to do so, provided that you have first, with spiritual love and courage, fulfilled your duty within your own community. There are those who detect much evil in their own group, but who, though they see it, are silent. Often such as these try to assuage their conscience by going out to admonish some unfortunate strangers in a distant hovel or saloon. Sheer folly that: it is folly and a desire for ostentation. It is shirking one’s duty under the guise of performing it. No blessing accrues to such practices. You must always begin by helping those whom God has placed in your way, in your house, in your circle of intimate friends. When you have done your duty there, you may go outside.

The life of the church offers still other opportunities for service. The church also has a social life. She observes the communion of the saints, and maintains service for that purpose. She provides for those who suffer. She seeks out the delinquent. She maintains missions to those still outside of holy baptism. These duties involve much work. Some of this work is of a high type; some of it is of a lower class. There is work for those who are officebearers, for those who function in offices that Christ has ordained. But there are also other duties that remind us of those performed by the hewers of wood and drawers of water among Israel. Money must be collected, ushers must maintain appropriate order at public services, the organ must be played, letters written, books supervised, etc.

All of these duties must be done, must be done well, and must be done with a willing heart. They must be done well because part of her honor depends upon whether or not she maintains a becoming order and propriety in her public manifestations. They must be done willingly and freely, as far as that is possible, because work that is paid for loses much of its spiritual savor. Salaried positions have always functioned detrimentally in the church of Jesus. Naturally he who devotes his full time and energy to the church must be provided with the means of living. Scriptures affirm that in the plainest of terms. But in all other cases it is far better that willingness and love motivate the services than that money intervene to create a condition such as Jesus once had to punish with a whip.

One caution may be appropriate; no one should push himself to the foreground in such matters. But if you are legitimately called upon to assume an office or by lesser means to assist in the life of your church, you should think twice before you refuse. Any feeling of incapability does not excuse you. Your church, not you, must judge your capabilities. To refuse is to manifest a cold attitude that does not savor of a love for the Christ. If the church is to flourish, each of her members should say, as Samuel said: “See, Lord, here am I.”
Interview with Eleanore Bol

It is March 20, 2008, and I am at the home of Eleanore Bol.

MHH: Can you tell me, Mrs. Bol, where and when you were born?
EB: I was born August 23, 1924. My parents lived on Baxter or Bemis, right near Eastern Avenue [Christian Reformed] Church.

MHH: Where did you grow up?
EB: We moved to Burton Street, near Kalamazoo Avenue, when I was about 2½. My parents built a new house there—out in the sticks. It was an old farm property.

MHH: So that would have been in the late 1920s.
EB: Right.
MHH: How long did you live on Burton Street?
EB: I got married in 1944, but then my husband was in the service. When he came back there wasn’t any place to live, so we stayed living with my parents. My mother had had a baby in ’44 and I had a baby in ’45, so we had two little babies. My parents built an extra room on the house. I lived there for about 25 years.

MHH: When you were growing up, what was your church affiliation?
EB: I was in the last group of babies to be baptized in Eastern Avenue [Christian Reformed] Church. I don’t know who else, but my parents always said we were the last ones to be baptized in Eastern Avenue Church.

MHH: So they were members of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed when you were a baby.
EB: Right. My father came from the Netherlands Reformed Church. But he had no problems at all coming to our church.

MHH: When you say “our church,” what do you mean by that?
EB: At that time it was Rev. Hoeksema’s church (laughter). That’s what everybody else called it. But anyway, it was the PR church. It was still during the controversy.

MHH: Did your father and mother leave Eastern Ave. and go with the dissenting group at that time?
EB: Correct.

MHH: Obviously you had to go along with them; you were born and raised in the Protestant Reformed Churches.
EB: That’s right. My grandparents went too—my mother’s parents—Peter and Alice Visser.

MHH: Were you members of First Protestant Reformed?
EB: Yes, we went to the new church. My brother Dave was baptized in the basement. They didn’t have the whole church finished yet.

MHH: What are your earliest memories of the church?
EB: Well, it was a big church. I remember my Dad being in the consistory most of the time because my mother and us kids sat under the balcony on the south side, and my Dad was probably one of the younger [consistory members]. My mother put the naughtiest boys (laughter) on the aisle so they were right across from my Dad. That’s one of the things that stands out in my mind.

MHH: Was the church often full?
EB: Oh yes! I don’t remember when I was very young, but when we got older, it just seemed like it was packed to the back balcony. I remember Mr. Dertien, the detective back there for naughty boys (and girls, too, maybe), and I heard stories about what went on up there. But it was funny at that time that the parents let the children sit up in the back balcony alone when they got older, instead of sitting with their families. I felt pretty grown up when I could do that. But I didn’t really feel comfortable sitting up there.

MHH: Is it fair to say that there was maybe a little bit of misbehavior going on at the same time?
EB: Well, I didn’t sit in that very back part. We sat on the edge of the balcony or on the sides. That was big stuff to sit by yourself. But, like I said, I wasn’t comfortable doing that.

MHH: Why do you think they did that?

EB: I have no idea. A growing-up custom, I guess. That doesn’t seem right in my thinking now. And I’m glad that they don’t do it today. Even the married couples come and sit by their parents.

MHH: Did you also attend catechism classes?

EB: Oh, yes. And that was austere (laughter). In the old seminary room. I remember all the big bookcases around that big room. I enjoyed catechism, but there were naughty kids there too.

MHH: What do you mean by austere?

EB: I think just the atmosphere. You couldn’t see out (laughter). No windows.

MHH: And who taught the catechism?

EB: Oh, I remember some of the seminary students, like Blankespoor. He stands out in my mind. But I had Rev. Hoeksema too, probably in the teenage years.

MHH: You probably had him for some of the doctrine classes?

EB: Probably.

MHH: You got married in what year?

EB: June 16 of 1944. My Dad, with Pete Zuidema and Pete Koster (I think those three) started Fourth Church [later called Southeast Church] because my Dad, being in the consistory, saw how the church was so big that you hardly knew the people. And people were moving out farther to the southeast, and so that’s how come we started Fourth Church. They worshiped in what had formerly been a gas station and a garage. It was two stories; we had classes upstairs and it was crude. My brother Dave and Helene [Hager] got married there. To come down the aisle she had to go through the coal room. (laughter)

MHH: Where was this located?

EB: Orville and Kalamazoo Avenue—Southeast Church. They changed the name and built the brick church. And that’s there today yet.

MHH: And that happened in the mid or late forties, perhaps?

EB: No, that church was built later because we left Fourth Church when Rich Veldman was preaching because we felt that he was on the fence. He didn’t come out with the controversy that was going on. And there were other things—it just got too uncomfortable being in church there, so we went back to First Church.

MHH: But the church had been built by that time?

EB: No, no. We never attended that new building.

MHH: Explain your comments a little bit about why you left, in connection with Rich Veldman and what was going on at that time as far as the church was concerned?

EB: Well, there were rumblings amongst the people in the congregation. There were sides. We were working against each other. Maybe I was just as guilty, because I had to make a paper one time and I likened it to something that was going on in the church, and somebody said, “Do you mean that?” And I said “Yes.” It wasn’t comfortable. Our former friends were getting polarized.

MHH: Over what?

EB: Because of the business with Kok and DeJong trying to sell us to get those people from the Netherlands that were in Canada—they caused trouble with H. Veldman, and then they were going to just cover up our differences so that our church would grow with all these people coming from the Netherlands.

MHH: And what do you feel the differences involved? What was the issue?

EB: Well, the whole Schilder issue.

MHH: The conditional covenant.

EB: Right.

MHH: That had its beginnings some years prior to 1953 then?

EB: Right. When that first Standard Bearer article had just come out and Rev. Ophoff had exposed what was going on. That was a turbulent visit at that time because my friends thought that that was awful, the way that Rev. Ophoff had exposed [what was happening]. And we felt that he had done the right thing.

MHH: And that was in terms of the covenant views of the Liberated in Canada?

EB: Right. And Kok and DeJong were responsible for that.

MHH: In what way?

EB: Because they tried to cover up and make it easy for those people to come to our church—to gloss over the differences. I think essentially that is what happened.

MHH: Did they have influence in Fourth Church,
then, as well as others?

EB: Why, sure. Every church had sides—people that agreed or disagreed with what was going on.

MHH: And you found yourself standing where?

EB: Ostracized, because most of the people (it seemed like) were going along with the Kok and DeJong business.

MHH: And you didn’t?

EB: Yes.

MHH: How long do you think this was brewing prior to 1953?

EB: Oh, let’s see. That would have been 1948 when it must have started—the late forties. I would say roughly five years.

MHH: As history shows, things came to a head in 1953 with a division in the churches. What are your memories of that?

EB: Well, I went to some of the synod meetings, and they were very turbulent. There were some things that I today think were not right. I know my mother would talk with other ladies. There were times when there was too much talking going on, I think. It didn’t help the issue, because that just polarized everybody more yet. I recall Lam Doezema’s [Rev. Lambert Doezema] remark in the basement of First Church at synod. I don’t remember what the issue was anymore, but he said, “I don’t care if the angels came down from heaven, such and such and such” (laughter). Oh, that just shattered me. I shouldn’t have gone to those meetings because it was too upsetting. Women can’t take that kind of stuff.

MHH: To your knowledge, what effect did the division in the churches have on families and friendships?

EB: It was really rough because it changed your life. The people you had visited before—that didn’t continue. But then, I was used to being criticized because when I was in high school yet, I had Rev. Stewart for a Bible teacher. I was maybe too bold in what I said sometimes, because when they made the Memoir [the class yearbook], they put in your qualifications or your character. One of the things they said about me was that I was argumentative. That wasn’t my thing, but in Bible I did [argue]. I can show you the Memoir today (laughter). That is the kind of thing that went on.

MHH: So you were not hesitant to speak your mind in this?

EB: No, it was such a part of our life, that we were indoctrinated, so these other people just thought I was arguing. They didn’t have any discussions like that. They didn’t know what I was talking about.

MHH: Were there hard feelings over this as well amongst family and friends?

EB: Yes. It was our everyday life to have hard feelings. There were some people you were comfortable with and some you weren’t. I remember at a Ladies’ Society meeting we were having a luncheon and it just seemed like we were just on edge. People would be quick to criticize if you made a comment about that there are few Christians in comparison to the wicked. Then this one lady said to me, “Yes, but there’s going to be 144 thousand” (laughter). Oh, it wasn’t comfortable.

MHH: Do you recall meeting in the Grand Rapids Christian High [School]?

EB: Oh, yes, we went there. We moved to Randolph in October of 1953. That was prompted because Rev. Henry Kuiper worked at the shop where my Dad and brother and husband had started a furniture shop. Henry Kuiper was trying to get back into the ministry. While he was working there, he got the call to Randolph, Wisconsin. He remembered how my husband liked the farm, and he thought that was a good place for him to come. He made all the arrangements. Of course, he’d like to have more people in the congregation. Because I had a new baby, and so I didn’t have the stamina not to go, so we went. We hated to leave because [EB’s oldest child] Dave was in the first kindergarten class to start at Adams School. Of course the school was all disrupted too. But Rev. Kuiper took away that concern because he said, “Oh, they got a school committee. They’re going to have a school in Randolph.” That was in 1953–54, which didn’t materialize for about 40 years (laughter). We were naïve. I felt that if my husband wanted to go, maybe he should get it out of his system, because he didn’t know what was going to happen, and he had never been on a dairy farm before. That cinched it. But that was quite an experience to move to a little basement church after being in big First Church. Then we had lost our baby [Stephen, who died of crib death]. Our life was kind of rough at that time. But there too in Randolph they had relatives that split up because of the split. Now what was I going to say about Randolph?

MHH: It was very small.
EB: That’s for sure. And then going to church morning and afternoon. And things were distracting for me. For one thing, the men would go into the barn before they went to church, with their wool suits on, and they smelled like a barn in church (laughter). And they had the one cup for communion. A certain gentleman knew that I didn’t like that—it wasn’t very sanitary. Somebody went with me and sat in the front seat, so at least I had another side of the cup (laughter). Because of having church in the afternoon, some of the parishioners were pretty sleepy. There was one family—she had a couple of little kids and she had a baby on her lap. The whole family was sleeping, and the baby slid off her lap (laughter). Rev. Ophoff came one time to preach and he was pounding on the pulpit. I thought, boy, he really hit that! He kept preaching, but then he stopped: “Oh, I guess I hit that a little too hard” (laughter). That was funny. One time my husband had to stay home because the bull got the ring out of his nose, and I went to church with the kids and left my husband home. He was going to try and get that bull! Afterwards I thought, how did I ever leave him? He could have been killed. But he managed. He got some fresh greens out of the field and he put that by a window in the barn. Somehow he got his hand in there and got that ring in the snout. Another time he couldn’t go to church. One of us had to stay home with one of the sick children, I guess. [Rev. Gerald] Vanden Berg was preaching, and we had communion. He asked if my husband was going to be there in the afternoon. He served communion just for him! That really wasn’t legit.

MHH: (laughter) For one person!

EB: Yes.

MHH: So you stayed in Randolph how long?

EB: 365 days! That was our contract. Then my husband was ready to go back [to Grand Rapids]. It [farming] didn’t work out financially. All the other young guys that came back from service could take over their fathers’ farms. But he didn’t have any collateral to get started with. Besides, he was a disabled veteran. Anyway, there were good times in Randolph too. We got to go to Madison, Wisconsin at least four times, and some of the natives there had never been there. They didn’t know what the Wisconsin Dells was like. We would manage it in between milking. Dave had a good time in school there. He had a bicycle and could ride those steep hills over to Friesland (it was Friesland, but it was called Randolph Christian School), but his schooling wasn’t very good. His teacher had had one year of normal [school], and so he got behind. But it was open country and he loved it there. The house wasn’t built for people that had been living in the city with conveniences, because we didn’t even have a drop of pure water. The well was polluted. The owner of the place (Ray Alsum) belonged to our church, which made it very hard. The people who had lived there before told us that they had the well tested and it wasn’t right, and he wouldn’t believe that. When we were ready to leave a year later, then he had it tested. He never let us know how it turned out. But our water supply was when we went to town on Saturday and got groceries. We would go and buy gasoline, and we’d fill a milk can full of water at the gas station. And [we had] outdoor privies (laughter). Then my husband would say, “Well, pioneer women made it all right.” Yeah, but the men didn’t have a 1953 Chrysler sitting in the garage either (laughter).

MHH: At the end of that year, you moved back to Michigan?

EB: Right. And then we were going to rent a house in Cutlerville. We lived in Cutlerville for about a couple of months, I think. Then we bought a house right near Adams School—on Silver Creek. [The children] could walk to school.

MHH: What church did you rejoin at that time?

EB: We went back to First Church. As a teenager, I remember Rev. Hoeksema’s sermons on Revelation. That was awesome. I remember people sitting way up on the platform, it was so crowded. I was spellbound. That has stayed with me all my life—the instruction that I had. It was hard to be patient with him after he had the stroke because he was so slow in speaking. I would take notes. I was a busy mother, and it was hard to be patient with him. I chide myself for that now, because now I probably cause other people to get impatient with me.

MHH: His speaking style changed considerably after his stroke?

EB: Right. He was slow. For young people, the minister I have now [Rev. G. Eriks] is so lively. And I think that’s good for these young people, because they’re
probably worse today than I was then because of the day and age we are living in.

MHH: What events or what history stands out in your mind—any specific incidents or customs or events—anything at all?

EB: Well, the church picnics at Franklin Park—that was a big deal, because all the churches came there and we had lectures at a picnic! (Laughter) That just seems so strange. [Here Eleanore becomes involved in a convoluted discussion regarding her friends, colloquially called “Dutch bingo,” which is not germane to the discussion, and which I have redacted]

Thinking about church again. I took lessons from Mr. Ryskamp, one of the organists. I took piano lessons first, and then I started taking organ lessons. All of a sudden he said that I could play in church. I didn't even graduate from grade school yet, and I just couldn't figure out that I could do that. But I guess I didn't have a nervous bone in my body at that time. I did it in 1939, because I graduated from grade school in '39. So I wasn't even 15 years old yet. Of course, I know someone else that was younger yet (laughter) [she refers here to MHH, though she is not entirely correct—she refers here to MHH, though she is not entirely correct—I was about the same age when I began to play the organ in First Church]. When I think of it now, then later on it bothered me more—the time difference of the voices—you’d get mixed up if you’d listen to the voices.

MHH: Yes, because they trailed the notes that you were playing.

EB: Right. I played for Dutch service sometimes. Rev. [Cornelius] Hanko had Dutch service in the afternoon. I couldn’t understand Dutch. I remember one Dutch word that sounds like “peacemaker.” That’s the one word that stood out in my mind. I didn’t know when to play and when not to. I don’t know how we managed, but that was something to play for a Dutch service.

MHH: What other customs or events stand out in your mind?

EB: I remember seeing my dad wearing this black patch band around his arm because one of our relatives had died. That was the custom in those days. I don’t think they did it that very long, though, because in my later years we didn’t have that. I must have been quite young at that time. Maybe it happened when my aunt was killed in a train wreck when I was nine years old. That was quite a traumatic thing to go through for me, as a child, that my aunt was killed and the police came to our house after midnight. As a nine-year-old child I heard my mother crying. I thought she had appendicitis (laughter). What made it so hard was that my aunt and uncle were divorced. [My uncle] took all the stuff out of her house. My grandpa was a widower at that time and he wanted to see how she had left her house. We got there and there the movers were. I remember he was enraged. But that was quite an ordeal. It was a scandal at that time. Divorces at that time were few and far between.

MHH: Very different from today!

EB: Yes. They are not less traumatic today, but they aren’t as rare, sorry to say.

MHH: This concludes my interview with Eleanore Bol.

June 9, 1991

Dear Dad,

I was sitting here thinking about our trip back to Michigan, and got to thinking of the visit we had with you at your house in New Amsterdam.

Christian Living

Ray Ezinga

A Father’s Day Letter

June 9, 1991

Sorry you were under the impression that we had already left and were gone without stopping in to see you. This could never be, you know, as the two things we went back there for was to visit you and my dad.

Sitting there listening to you and Jean talking
together, after looking at your flowers and your garden, I got to thinking about all the years that have gone by and all the good times God has graciously given us. The more I thought of it, the more I was impressed by one thought. Father’s day will soon be here, and although you aren’t my dad, I thought I would sit down and put some thoughts on paper.

Fathers-in-law are generally not made a fuss over. Fathers are one thing, and we make a special effort to send them cards on Father’s Day, but fathers-in-law are not much celebrated.

I remember going out to your barn with an engagement ring in my pocket and asking your OK to give it to Jean. You said that would be fine and gave me your blessing. Then you finished helping that nanny goat deliver her kid.

Some thirty-eight years have gone by since that happened. Jean and I now have children of our own. Now I’m a dad-in-law. Looking back, that time seems to have gone by very swiftly. Your children grow up, and with all the work and care that goes along with bringing up a family, it seems that a good deal of the training of the children in the home falls on the mother. Without a God-fearing mother in the home, a marriage would be doomed to failure. It always struck me that at a time in your life when you have the least amount of sense, you make the most important decision of your life—who you will spend the rest of your life with.

I believe that God provides to every man his wife, and what a blessing when he gives you a God-fearing and good wife. Then the time soon comes when our children grow up, and a young man is soon standing there asking you for your daughter’s hand in marriage. You think back on all the memories, all the love you poured out on that little girl from the day that God gave her to you until now. You think of all the fun you’ve had with her, all the teaching of catechism lessons, all the prayer for her, and suddenly you are asked to give her away! You do, of course, if he is a child of God, and by this time you had better have made it your business to know.

I guess what I’m writing about is that I’m not much good with words and being able to say what I want to, so I’m taking this way of putting them down on paper so that I can sort them out and get them nearly right. What I really want to do is thank you for Jean. For thirty-eight years now she has stood by me through thick and thin. She has been a good Christian wife, and God has blessed our marriage with one son and two daughters. You read in Proverbs about how a husband is blessed by being given a godly wife. It puts her price far above rubies, and the heart of her husband delighteth in her.

Jean and I have brought up our children together. She has clothed and fed them, bandaged up their hurts, sung them to sleep, and most of all taught them about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. She saw to it that they knew their catechism lessons and that they knew their Sunday School verses. She has been a good wife and mother, and I thank God for her continually.

Since we are now grandparents, she has a new job—that of helping our grandchildren. One imagines that when the children are all gone out of the house, then the responsibility and worry is over. You soon learn that this is not so. A grandmother and grandfather have positions of great importance in the minds of their grandchildren. I watch Jean with the grandchildren and see that she is also a good grandmother.

God has blessed us with ten grandchildren, and we see our children’s children being brought up in what we believe to be the true church. The fact that we married in the Lord and are faithfully bringing up our grandchildren is a great comfort to us.

When we left, you said to me, “Take good care of my little girl.” That kind of got to me, I guess, and I guess I started thinking of these things. Don’t worry—I’ll do my best to take care of your “little girl.” You see, I love her same as you do. I received from God a good Christian wife that day I married her, and we have been most richly blessed.

You are now 89 years old. That’s old for the children of men. You seem to live a useful and enjoyable life with your garden and keeping old ladies supplied with fresh vegetables—with the hope of fresh-baked pies in return. You expressed your readiness to go to the home that God has prepared for you, eternal in the heavens.

So before you do, I take this opportunity to thank you for everything you have done for us, and especially for Jean.

Your son-in-law,
Ray Ezinga  🙏
Answered Prayer
Read Psalm 21
Psalm 21, like Psalm 20, was written by David and again refers to “the king” in the third person. In Psalm 20 the people prayed, “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble... and...grant thee according to thine own heart.” In Psalm 21 they exclaim, “Thou hast given him his heart’s desire, and hast not withheld the request of his lips.”

What was it that David desired of the Lord? He asked for life and for deliverance from his enemies. David’s requests were not motivated by selfishness, for God does not honor prayers driven by self-centeredness or greed, as the inspired apostle James notes in James 4:3, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” Rather, David prayed for these things for the good of God’s people, so that Jehovah’s name would be exalted by them (see Psalm 21:13).

Is that the desire of our hearts and the motivation behind our petitions? Then “this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14).

Sing or pray Psalter #45.

Prevented with the Blessings of Goodness
Read Psalm 21
What does the Psalmist mean when he writes, “Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness”? The meaning of the word prevent in this text is similar to that of the word precede. It means “to go before.” John Calvin notes, “The meaning is, that such will be the liberality and promptitude of God, in spontaneously bestowing blessings, that he will not only grant what is asked from him, but, anticipating the requests of the king, will load him with every kind of good things far beyond what he had ever expected.” Matthew Henry adds, “But when God’s blessings come sooner, and prove richer than we imagine; when they are given before we prayed for them, before we were ready for them...then it may be truly said that he prevented, or went before us, with them.”

Perhaps God has prevented you with physical bounties. He has certainly prevented all of his people with spiritual riches: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Sing or pray Psalter #45.

Jehovah’s Fiery Judgement
Read 2 Thessalonians 1
While the first verses of Psalm 21 recount the prosperity of the King and his people, the latter verses reveal their inner prosperity’s necessary counterpart: Jehovah is his people’s strong defense. He is the one who finds out all his enemies and judges them. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, these enemies deserve their fiery end, “For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform” (Ps. 21:11). They are those who trouble the saints of God and “obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8).

While God’s “divine power ought justly to strike terror into the wicked, so it is described as full of the sweetest consolation to us, which ought to inspire us with joy, and incite us to celebrate it with songs of praise and thanksgiving” (Calvin). When we battle sin and temptation, we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the Divine Archer has arrows aimed at our enemies (Ps. 21:12). The health of our spiritual lives depends upon his protection.

Sing or pray Psalter #45.
Perfect Through Sufferings
Read Psalm 22:1–21

We confess that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God. It is the holy book of which Jesus said, “Search the scriptures...they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). That truth is clearly evident in Psalm 22, in which David prophetically describes the sufferings of our Lord. This passage gives us access into our Savior’s inner agony as he suffered for our sakes. His humiliation is described in striking detail, including his disciples’ forsaking of him, the mocking of the multitudes, the piercing of his hands and feet, and the casting of lots for his garment. The fourth of Jesus’ seven crosswords, which are recorded for us in the gospel accounts, is a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

Are you filled with awe as you read this Psalm? The one who was forsaken by the Holy One of Israel is himself holy. But God “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Sing or pray Psalter #47.

Not Ashamed to Call Us Brethren
Read Hebrews 2:10–18

In the first 21 verses of Psalm 22, Christ speaks as he humbles himself unto death, even the death of the cross. In verses 22 and following he speaks as our risen and exalted Lord. Verse 22 is quoted in Hebrews 2:12, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” Christ is not ashamed to call us “brethren,” for he assumed the same human nature that is ours. He was made like us in all things, sin excepted. When we endure trials, we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that he also suffered and that “the servant is not greater than his lord” (John 15:20). Our merciful and faithful High Priest not only made propitiation for our sins; as one who suffered, he is able to help us in our troubles.

All humans have the same nature, and all men, women, and children experience the bitter consequences of Adam’s fall. Does this make us all Christ’s brethren? No. His “brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it” (Luke 8:21).

Sing or pray Psalter #47.

In the Midst of the Congregation
Read Psalm 22:22–26

Our next-door neighbors belong to the growing number of Christians who are not members of an instituted church; instead, they worship at home each Sunday. But in Psalm 22 David—and through him, Christ—declares Jehovah’s name to his brethren and praises him “in the midst of the congregation.” This congregation is not a small gathering of people. Verse 25 reads, “My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.” The psalmist exhorts all those who are gathered together with him to praise, glorify, and fear Jehovah. Why? “For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard” (v. 24). Those who are gathered together encourage and edify one another. There, in the congregation, the meek are fed—and filled—not with earthly bread, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (v. 26).

Some of God’s saints are unable to meet together for public worship. Do you pray for them? And do you consider public worship a privilege? Is it a regular, important part of your life?

Sing or pray Psalter #51.

All the Ends of the World
Read Psalm 22:27–31

The church of Jesus Christ is comprised of people from all the ends of the world and all the ages of history. Our risen, victorious Lord is head of a body in which small and great, rich and poor, bond and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile are fitly joined together. Revelation 21 describes the breathtaking beauty of that bride as that of the city that has “the glory of God” and light “like unto a stone most precious.” What joy to be a citizen of that city!

Christ hasn’t come yet because some of his church must still be gathered. So he rides the white horse over all the world, sending forth the sure, sharp arrows of his word through those who heed his call to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and in answer to the prayers of those who, unable to reach the mission fields on their feet, reach them on their knees. Some members of his church have yet to be born. Perhaps those include our children, or our children’s children. To them we must show the “praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done” (Psalm 78:4).

Sing or pray Psalter #49.

The Lord is My Shepherd
Read Psalm 23:1–3

Throughout my childhood, my dad kept a flock of sheep that roamed freely around our farmyard. One Sunday, as we hurriedly left for the morning worship service, we saw a ewe with her head stuck in the fence that separated our farmyard from the cornfield. True to cliché, the grass on the other side had looked greener to her. She had now finished gorging herself, but she wasn’t smart enough to turn her head in order to wriggle back out of the opening. Dad decided to free her when we got home. But by the time we returned, she had lain down on the grass, and, too stubborn or too foolish to stand back up, had strangled herself on the fence wire.

God refers to us as sheep throughout the Bible. That metaphor is not a compliment to us. Rather, it’s a picture that emphasizes our helplessness. If left to ourselves, we would foolishly and stubbornly pursue our own spiritual death. But we are Jehovah’s sheep. His Son is the good Shepherd who laid down his life for us. If you belong to him, you will never want.
bordered by rolling cornfields. The wind is always whispering—or rushing, as the case may be—through its lofty pine trees. The Rock River rambles below. Yet there, on that lovely hill, I’ve faced the grief of the valley of the shadow of death.

If you are a sheep of the good shepherd, you will never want, not even in the valley of the shadow. That’s true because he will walk with you there. There his Spirit will comfort you with the knowledge that you are not your own, but belong unto your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He will be your constant companion throughout your life, guiding with his staff and disciplining with his rod. When we rest in that comfort by faith, you and I can even face death with these confident words on our lips: “I will fear no evil.”

Sing or pray Psalter #53.

God’s Garden
Read 1 Cor. 15:35–58

Last week my children and I planted the first seeds of the year in our garden. This morning we noticed a few little lettuce plants emerging from the ground.

At my grandma’s funeral a couple of months ago, as we stood in the cemetery that I described yesterday, Rev. Engelsma reminded us that our forefathers referred to the graveyard as “God’s Garden.” There we sow the seeds of the dead bodies of those whom we love. Unless the Lord returns before you and I die, someday our bodies will be buried, too. But like the seeds that we plant in our gardens, our bodies will rise again! And just like a lettuce plant is far more wonderful than its tiny, brown seed, so our resurrected bodies will be far more glorious than these bodies—bodies that get hungry and thirsty, weak and weary, bodies that are dying.

When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we can say, “I will fear no evil,” because we know that God has given us the victory over death through our Lord Jesus Christ. We will rise!

Sing or pray Psalter #53.

A Table Prepared
Read Song of Solomon 2

In recent years, the importance of family mealtime has been touted by a variety of sources. Researchers credit regularly eating together as a family with a variety things, from a superior vocabulary to a healthier body weight. Even more importantly, mealtime is usually a Christian family’s opportunity to feed their souls in family worship as well.

Shared meals symbolize unity and fellowship. That’s why the Pharisees accused Jesus when he ate with publicans and sinners (Luke 5:30). That’s also why there’s abundant significance in Psalm 23:5a, “Thou preparest a table before me,” and Song of Solomon 2:4, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” Those passages celebrate the communion with God and the abundance of blessings that are ours, thanks to sacrifice of our Good Shepherd. We are more than his sheep: we are his children and members of his beloved bride, who are seated at his table. That’s also the significance of the Lord’s Supper, which symbolizes our partaking of our Savior’s body and blood and our unity with the members of his Bride.

There’s some “food for thought” to “chew on” the next time your family gathers for a meal!

Sing or pray Psalter #53.

Eating In the Presence of the Enemy
Read Psalm 23:5

David exults in the reality that his shepherd prepares a table before him in the presence of his enemies. Our family once borrowed a children’s picture book from the library that illustrated Psalm 23. That book depicted a small sheep eating in the safety of a barn while wolves lurked outside its shepherd-guarded door. Perhaps David had in mind a feast that would follow a battle, a meal at which a king and his men would gather to celebrate their victory in full view of their newly-conquered hostages.

Both of those pictures are fitting to the life of the Christian. We are like the little sheep: we enjoy abundant spiritual blessings even as the devil prowls about like a lion, seeking to devour us. We eat and are filled on the feast of God’s word even while living in the middle of a wicked world. And we look forward to the day when our victorious King will return. On that day we’ll be ushered into the great marriage feast of the lamb before the eyes of our enemies—a feast prepared and earned for us by our good shepherd.

Sing or pray Psalter #55.

My Cup Overflows
Read Numbers 5:11–31

Our Good Shepherd not only prepares us a table in the presence of our enemies, but also anoints our heads with the oil of gladness and gives us an overflowing cup.

The metaphor of a cup is common in scripture. Many passages speak of a figurative cup of judgement or blessing (see Ps. 11:6 and Ps. 16:5). In Numbers 5, God commands that a woman suspected of adultery drink a literal cup of water mixed with dust. The effect that the contents of the cup had upon that woman would either clear her name or condemn her as guilty of unfaithfulness.

According to God’s word, every sin that you and I commit is spiritual adultery against our heavenly husband, who is eternally jealous for our holiness and our love. If we were to drink the cup of the cursing, we would be condemned. But that cup was drunk for us by our Savior, though consideration of its horror wrung bloody sweat from him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Because that cup did not pass from him, our cup of cursing has become a cup of blessings, blessings that overflow. What are some of the blessing with which he’s filled your cup?

Sing or pray Psalter #55.

Nothing Over
Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–15

Wouldn’t it be enough if God gave us a full cup? Why does he give us a cup that overflows?

Our overflowing cups teach us about God. He is rich in mercy, and he loves us with great love. Throughout the ages to come he will continue to show us “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ
Negatively, God does not bless us with abundance so that we, like the rich fool in Luke 12, hoard all that he has given us to ourselves. Rather, he wills that we share what he has entrusted to us with those who have less. Those of us who live in the Western world are rich in material things. We are also the recipients of a rich theological and ecclesiastical heritage. Each of us has been given time and our own particular talents to use to the praise of God and for the good of others. Seeing we abound in these things, let’s see to it that we abound in the grace of giving also.

Sing or pray Psalter #55.

Where Your Treasure Is

Read Matt. 6:19–34

When we give of what God has entrusted to us to needy neighbors and kingdom causes, we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Missionary Jim Elliot said it well: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Our treasure tends to follow our hearts. The things on which we spend our time and money reveal a lot about us. Do I think happiness can be found in earthly possessions? I’ll likely be planning my next purchase as soon as the previous transaction has taken place. Do you believe that the world’s endless entertainments will satisfy your soul? You’ll spend precious hours surfing the Internet, following sports teams, or sitting in front of the TV. But we can also make sanctified decisions regarding the use of our treasure, deliberately leading our hearts. Do you wish you had more of an interest in missions or PR special education? Give of your money to those causes, and your heart will follow. Does the Christian school or the needy saint in your congregation mean little to you? Invest your time in the school or that individual, and your heart will follow. Sing or pray Psalter #52

Beset Behind and Before

Read Psalm 23:6

Several days ago we considered this phrase from Psalm 21: “Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness.” I noted that the word prevent there means precede. Not only does goodness go before the child of God; according to Psalm 23:6, goodness and mercy also follow him. This following is not a leisurely shadowing, either; it’s an intense pursuit. Our God pursues us like a protective Father who never lets us out of his sight. He pursues us like a jealous husband with his unfailing covenant love. It’s true that sometimes he manifests his encompassing mercy and goodness in the way of chastisement. That’s because he would have his goodness and mercy follow you all of the days of your life—not only the days of your earthly pilgrimage, but on into eternity.

God also pursues the wicked: he pursues them with the flood of his just judgment (Nah. 1:8). Like a tsunami wave, it will overwhelm and destroy them. But the goodness and mercy with which he pursues his children bears them safely to the golden shore, there to abide in everlasting joy for endless days. Sing or pray Psalter #52.

Home Forever

Read John 14:1–11

David concludes Psalm 23 with this beautiful declaration: “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” As we noted a couple of days ago, a shared meal can be a time of truly enjoyable fellowship. But have you ever invited someone over for a meal, only to wonder if they would ever leave? Or perhaps, like me, you’ve been the embarrassed guest who realizes too late that you’ve overstayed your welcome! With our God, we never have to worry about overstaying our welcome. That’s true because the Lord doesn’t invite us to his banqueting table for a single meal: he has prepared a home for us that we never have to leave. It’s one thing to enjoy a meal at someone’s house: it’s another thing to stay there for the rest of your life. But that’s the glorious future of those whom God has adopted to be his sons and daughters. His heavenly home is now our home, a house of many mansions that we will never have to leave. Jesus Christ is there now, preparing a place for you. Is your heart filled with longing for that home?

Sing or pray Psalter #52.

Who Shall Ascend?

Read Psalm 24

Psalm 24 was likely sung as the ark of the covenant was brought back to the tabernacle through the gates of Jerusalem. That day—and this psalm—are full of prophetic meaning for us. Psalm 24:3 echoes Psalm 15:1: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer? “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” In other words, not you or I as we are by nature, for we are the children of Adam and Eve.

When Adam and Eve fell, God drove them out of Eden, the beautiful garden where he walked and talked with them. The entrance to paradise was barred and the tree of life guarded by cherubim with flaming swords. Similarly, cherubim were embroidered on the veil that separated the holy place of the tabernacle from the most holy place, and they guarded the atonement cover of the ark of the covenant. Yet the return of the ark to Jerusalem was reason for celebration, for it signified God’s merciful presence with his people, and pointed to the glorious king who was to come.

Sing or Pray Psalter #58.

The Ascended King of Glory

Read Psalm 24

The garden of Eden and the most holy place were barred to the human race. But that is not all. The gates of heaven were shut and locked against any sinner who would enter in. Thanks be to God for our mediator, the man with clean hands and a pure heart, who receives “the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” He is the King “mighty in battle,” for he sustained God’s just wrath against our sin and prevailed over Satan and his hosts. At the moment of his victory, the veil of the temple was torn in two, and the way into God’s presence was opened for all those who have faith in him. He is the King of glory who went...
up with a shout (Ps. 47:5), and the gates of heaven gave way. Now that King of glory sits at the right hand of God. He governs all things, and by his Holy Spirit pours out heavenly graces upon us, his members. He will continue to defend and preserve us against all of our enemies until the day that he returns to take us to live with him in paradise forever (Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 19).

Sing or pray Psalter #58.

June 28 The Lord of Hosts Read 2 Kings 6:8–23

Psalm 24:10 reads, “Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.”

“The Lord of hosts”—or Jehovah Sabaoth—is a name of God that teaches us that we serve a God who is far greater than any of our enemies, trials, or troubles. Jehovah Sabaoth rules over the host of creation: “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). He commands legions of mighty angels, whom he charges to keep you in all your ways (Ps. 91:11). This is the mighty God in whose name David confronted Goliath: “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts” (1 Sam. 17:45). This is the God whose armies surrounded Elisha and his fearful servant: “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16). Do not fear! The Lord of hosts is with us! In him we are more than conquerors, for nothing shall be able to separate us from his love (Rom. 8:35ff).

Sing or pray Psalter #58.

June 29 Teach Me Read Psalm 25

Did you know that even if you are on summer break (and even if you are not yet or are no longer a student) you are still enrolled in God’s school? The chief purpose of the Christian’s life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We’re only able to do that as we grow in knowledge of him and of his way. The prayer of Psalm 25:4-5 must be our own: “Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me.”

The Holy Spirit of God is the perfect teacher. He guides us into all truth: that is, he guides us as we study the Holy Scriptures, which are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). But are we sorry for our sins, and do we love the Lord so much that we are fearful of doing anything that would offend him? (Ps. 25:8, 12). He will teach us if we have students’ hearts: “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (vs. 9). And when all our lessons are learned, we’ll graduate…to glory.

Sing or pray Psalter #60.

June 30 Lead Me Read Psalm 25:1–5

Our youngest child is just beginning to take a few hesitant steps. He clings to my hand as he shuffles along, trusting that I will direct him past any obstacles and catch him if he falls. He giggles with delight all the way. That’s a beautiful picture of the Christian life. We noted yesterday that the Holy Spirit teaches those who are meek. Jesus said, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). You and I do not know even what the remainder of this day holds for us. Why, then, do we so stubbornly attempt to walk alone? Why are we so quick to claim exemptions for ourselves from God’s word, either as we study it or hear it preached? His vision reaches farther than ours. He knows what obstacles lie in the way. We’re called to cling to him with childlike faith as we walk through this life.

When you walk that way, the God of hope will “fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:13). Do you trust your heavenly Father to lead you step-by-step?

Sing or pray Psalter #60.

July 1 Sins of Youth Read Psalm 25:6–11

Job 12:12 declares, “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding.” Part of that understanding in the life of the aging child of God is an increased understanding of and awareness of one’s own sin. When I reflect on my youth, I remember many sins that still bring me shame and grief. If you are an adult, the same is likely true of you. Some of the sins of youth result in bitter consequences that last for the length of one’s life: be warned, young people! Though painful, that reality is something for which we must be thankful, for the Lord strengthens our faith and sanctifies us in the way of chastisement.

Yet we are not to dwell on sins that God has forgiven. When the sins of your youth trouble you, pray with David, “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions” (Ps. 25:7). If the Lord would mark our iniquities, not one of us would stand. Be there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared (Ps. 130:3-4). May your praise continually be of him who has been your trust from your youth (Ps. 71:5).

Sing or pray Psalter #61.

July 2 Be An Example Read 2 Timothy 2

Our culture idolizes youth. As each year of my life passes, I’m more aware of society’s pressure to look young and to act young. The Bible, in contrast, admonishes those who are young (and those who haven’t grown up, even though they’ve aged): “Flee youthful lusts!” (2 Tim. 2:22). The world in general also excuses teenagers from responsibility and accountability. But the Bible doesn’t recognize such a stage: God’s word speaks of children and adults. The apostle Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11).

Young people, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” you ask. By taking heed to God’s word. May this be your confession: “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:9-11).

Sing or pray Psalter #61.
The Secret of the Lord
Read Psalm 25:12–22

Hebrew parallelism is common in the Bible. Parallel poetry is comprised of two phrases that balance one another. Those phrases can be antithetical—“He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die” (Prov. 19:16)—or synonymous: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14). Whether synonymous or antithetical, the two parallel phrases help us discern the meaning of many texts.

The Bible uses the word covenant to describe God’s relationship with his people. Psalm 25:14 teaches that God’s covenant is like a secret shared between two close friends. It is not a cold, conditional agreement. Those of us who have grown up in Christian homes have likely experienced that friends sometimes come and go, but we experience an abiding closeness with our family members. God’s covenant is friendship among family members: we are God’s children, the siblings of our elder brother, and members of Christ’s bride. To us our covenant is like a secret shared between two close friends. It is not a ship with his people. Psalm 25:14 teaches that God’s covenant is friendship among family members, the mediator of the covenant.

There is a Friend
Read Proverbs 18

Before we move on to Psalm 26, I’d like to consider two texts from Proverbs. In the KJV Prov. 18:24 reads, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Is that text an example of antithetical or synonymous parallelism? Different translations render it very differently. The ESV reads, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.” The editors of the Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible comment, “The idea is either that to have friends one must make friends, or that having multiple friends, without a close one, will result in disappointment.” I suggest that the two very different translations can be reconciled: a man who would have friends must come to ruin, that is, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). That would make the parallelism synonymous, for the friend who sticks closer than a brother is the one who laid down his life for many friends. He is Jesus, the firstborn among many brethren, the mediator of the covenant.

Born for Adversity
Read Proverbs 17

I once thought Prov. 17:17 was an example of antithetical parallelism: “A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Doesn’t that read like an observation of the sad reality that we sometimes treat our acquaintances better than those who live under the same roof?

But the two phrases are actually synonymous. Think of it this way: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born to help in times of adversity.” That brings the marriage vows to my mind. Husband and wife promise to cherish and to honor for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. That’s the kind of love we’re called to have not only for our relatives, but for all those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we see our spouse, sibling, or church member in need, we must not shy away from them. Instead, this must be our attitude: “I was born to help them! That’s why I’m here!”

That’s the example Jesus set for us. He came into the world to save sinners: he was born to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (1 Tim. 1:15; Heb. 9:26).

Judge Me, O Lord
Read Psalm 26:1–3

I’m ashamed to say that I spend way too much time wondering about what other people think of me. Prov. 29:25 teaches, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” When we fear men, we make our decisions based on others’ opinions (or what we perceive their opinions to be). When we fear men, we’ll allow the judgements of men to dictate everything from our family size to how we clothe ourselves. But when we fear God, we act according to the unchanging principles set forth in his infallible word. Why do we fear men? We ought to fear God, who said, “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17:10).

David begins Psalm 26 with the prayer that the Lord judge him and examine his heart. How often do you examine your heart, holding up your thoughts and motives before the penetrating gaze of God’s word? Do you ask the searcher of hearts to examine you?

Walk with Wise Men
Read Psalm 26

David asks God to judge him and examine his heart because he is confident that he has walked in the way of integrity. His thoughts and actions were consistent with his profession that he loved and belonged to the Lord. One of the ways in which David proved his integrity was by refusing to keep company with vain people, hypocrites, evil doers, wicked men, and those who loved violence.

Who are your friends? When you choose your friends, do you keep in mind Solomon’s words to his son in Prov. 13:20: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed”? What about Prov. 22:24–25: “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul”? Asaph understood that God sets the wicked in slippery places; he justly casts them down into destruction. But David loved God’s people. His friends were fellow saints. That’s why he could say, “My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the Lord” (Ps. 26:12).

Sing or pray Psalter #65.

Sing or pray Psalter #66.

Sing or pray Psalter #67.

Sing or pray Psalter #68.

Sing or pray Psalter #69.

Sing or pray Psalter #70.

Sing or pray Psalter #71.

Sing or pray Psalter #72.
Patriarchy from Athens to Today

It may be one’s lot in life to live in the midst of a patriarchal society. Many converts in the New Testament did. Does patriarchy exist today? The roots of Christian patriarchy follow out of the world’s patriarchy, so it is good to trace its path.

Last time we saw that Aristotle’s ideas dominated society for most of the past two thousand years. This influence lasted because it had order and it was efficient. Order is a good thing. Groups of people that are trying to work cooperatively for overall benefit need a certain organization, and a ruler emerges. Even the nation of Israel needed judges and later had kings for good order. Human depravity makes organization and leaders necessary.

Aristotle’s hierarchy was different from the typical nation organized with kingly rulers, an army, and the citizens. Through his unique but spiritually blind use of logic, he believed that the physical differences of people and the social order of animals taught him that the whole society should have a hierarchical order to it. He believed and taught that this order included the right and duty of rule to be given to the physically and mentally superior people of the land. In Athens these were going to be the wealthy, educated Greek people and mostly men. Roman culture admired the Greeks and was highly influenced by them. The Romans adopted Aristotle’s social order, and it did provide a certain kind of peace and increased prosperity. It also justified to the Greeks and Romans the spread of their control over other lands. They believed they were destined to take over those weaker, less urbanized, and ‘inferior’ people.

Greek-Roman territory grew to include North Africa, the Mediterranean and eastward through Iran, north through the Netherlands and west through Europe and the United Kingdom. Aristotle’s social order of patriarchy accompanied their control in these territories. The human depravity that requires order is also the very thing that makes this patriarchal hierarchy turn into a problem with very bad results. The elite at the top of this system soon do everything they can to preserve their position. The peace never lasts and the oppressed of the system eventually marshal their strength and rise up. Patriarchal order is effective because it includes a form of racism, subjugation of the lowly, and the preferential treatment of the elite. These three things are condemned in the Bible.

With Aristotle’s social order of superior over the inferior, slavery had taken on a racial component. It also locked in the future generations to more slavery. Previously most slavery was brought on by poverty, personal debt, or being a captive in a war; one’s state of slavery had not always been permanent. Slavery prevailed on and off throughout most lands. Race, and later on religious difference, was now also a reason for slavery. Slaves were mere items to be owned. The women and children of slaves could be sold off separately at any time. Slaves could legally be killed.

Near the end of medieval times the British and Dutch Empires grew. The expansion of colonial exploitation around the world began, and white male patriarchy found revival in Europe. Slavery, especially of Africans, made a comeback in the Netherlands with her colonies. Soon Britain, her colonies, and a few other countries joined this slave trade. The business of trading African slaves to their colonies for the goods produced by slaves in those colonies further enriched the growing British and Dutch economies. Slavery was justified by claiming that these people were barbaric savages, without laws or religions, and therefore not fully human. It was claimed that slavery was actually a good thing for these people because they could acquire civilization on the plantations in America and other British and Dutch colonies. Around 1770 some Christians began to question prevailing interpretations of the Bible that taught that slavery was a good and even commendable activity. They began to work towards abolishing slavery.

The British elite of the pre-Victorian era totally embraced patriarchy. They valued their lineage and protected the continuity of their family lines and elite social position as well as their wealth, power, and control. They believed they were born to rule by divine right. Strict obedience to the male leaders...
was expected. They saw their society as family and themselves as the father. They believed it was their duty to guide society like one would guide a child. They protected their traditions and power with laws, including laws according to which the first-born male inherited everything. Patriarchy also grew in the Netherlands as its Dutch Empire grew during the same era. The link between men and fathers to the rule of God the Father was abused to sanction further the idea of father rule, male dominance, and of patriarchs who govern. With this concept, the Dutch patriarchal fathers could infuse themselves with supreme authority and extend it to the ruler who was perceived as the symbolic father. Those in power often abuse the Bible and religion to justify their actions and ideas and retain their power. Father-son relationships were celebrated to honor the lineage. Patriarchal practices of exchanging women from elite families for marriage that benefited both parties were common. Family heads controlled whom their daughters married according to the needs of the family or aspirations of the father.

In the early 1800s a more ugly side of Aristotle’s hierarchical mindset emerged through some English scholars. Charles Darwin, his half-cousin Francis Galton, and a contemporary, Herbert Spencer, developed their ideas. Darwin’s book on natural selection, Spencer’s coined phrase, ‘survival of the fittest,’ and Galton’s expansion of Darwin’s studies had a new ability to rank races and maintain patriarchy’s idea of the superior controlling the inferior. The publication of Darwin’s The Origin of Species had a chapter called ‘Variation Under Domestication’ which concerned the breeding of domestic animals, and this changed Galton’s life. He explored the variety in human populations and its implications for society. He developed a system of defining a family’s genetic merit. He promoted early, youthful marriages between qualifying families. Finding a ‘proper’ spouse really meant finding a genetically preferred spouse. He encouraged government incentives for qualifying couples to have children. Galton invented the term eugenics. This is the practice of improving the genetic quality of a population, and he lectured in Europe about it. It advocated a higher reproduction level of people with desired traits and the reduced level of reproduction by people with less desirable traits. The methods used were restricted or regulated marriages and forced sterilization. The traits deemed unfit to be carried into the next generation included mental and physical disabilities, criminals, deviants and dis-favored minority groups. One of these traits in your broader family would really make marriage into an elite family impossible. The fear of negative stigma concerning one’s family genetics contributed to the practice where families quickly stashed away their physically and mentally disabled members into an institution and rarely spoke of them openly. It also discouraged interracial marriages.

Herbert Spencer, a follower of Darwin, advocated the idea that ‘the survival of the fittest’ could and should be applied to society. He also encouraged the careful oversight of which people had the right to bare children and who would be restricted as unworthy. His ideas were later called Social Darwinism. Spencer’s applications of ‘survival of the fittest’ appealed to the elite who were already in power. It fueled the elitism, greed, and unbridled capitalism in Britain and the U.S. at that time. He argued that social welfare programs only interfered with natural selection to the detriment of humankind. Social and religious leaders hotly debated these ideas. Later, a truly dark side of patriarchy, eugenics and genetic cleansing reached a terrible climax in Nazi Germany.

The early American settlers had come from England, bringing with them their patriarchal mindset. Many considered the native people of this land to be inferior and even non-human because they were barbaric and savage. We know that they were very ungodly and steeped in pantheism, but they were not inferior as humans and should not have been viewed as such. Later, when the Irish, Italians, and Asians came to America in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they also were considered lower humans and discriminated against. The founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, who came along about 100 years after Darwin, fully embraced Galton’s eugenics. In her Plan for Peace, she promoted the eradication of the poor, the feebleminded, and the Negro. She believed that the over-running of society with inferior minorities and poor that she called ‘human weeds’ would lead to the end of humanity.

Patriarchy exists in many Arabic, Asian, and Indian societies and women are often considered property as well as less than human and sometimes even less than animals. There are no penalties for someone who assaults them and in some countries there is even legal protection for the men who assault any woman including their own wives. The Chinese for many years have killed their infant daughters.
Prior to the mid-1800s, most legal systems worldwide accepted wife-beating as a valid exercise of a husband’s authority over his wife. In 1866 the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed. It predated the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, established in 1875. Both predated any organization aimed at preventing cruelty to women. Although wife-beating was made illegal in all states of the U.S. by 1920, it was the 1970s before concern about wives being beaten by their husbands gained significant attention. The feminist movements throughout the 1900s challenged the patriarchy in America. Their use of unlawful, blatant rebellion was wrong. Yet this does not make some of the things that they accomplished automatically sinful.

Psychiatrists today trace patriarchy back to pre and early Victorian times and back to Aristotle. To most experts, patriarchy is the explanation for how a small number of men managed to dominate and control the growing wealth and power of the British Empire. Patriarchy was and is a very universal social format. Psychiatrists understand how patriarchy leads to much oppression and discrimination. Many believe that evolution contributed to patriarchy, and they try to think of ways to evolve beyond it.

There are many books and articles written around the world about patriarchy and how it has impacted people and relationships. The principles of patriarchy encourage pride and arrogance and very often lead to physical and emotional abuse of those who are considered to be inferior. The principle of patriarchy also causes the inferior of the system to believe that they deserve this treatment. Some are so emotionally weakened that they will even allow themselves to be killed or nearly killed because they believe that they have no choice. Women are often unable or too fearful to protect their own children. The need to overcome the effects of patriarchy in peoples’ lives keeps psychiatrists busy all over the globe.

The world is full of sin, and the fall of man brought devastation to the animal world. Aristotle’s study of animals and society around him was accurate, but his application of what he learned was not profitable for everyone involved. Using these things as a guide for how to live or how to direct society led to a lot of sorrow and more sin. Without God as his guide, man cannot be just or loving. Next time we will explore the birth of Christian patriarchy.

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**From the Classroom**

**Kelsey Kuiper**

**What Next?**

This is it. This is the class of 2015’s last year at high school. It is our last year with all the people we have grown up with, and now we each have to prepare for what comes next as we go our separate ways. This decision is our own; no one can make it for us. For me, as well as many others I know, the idea of what next? scares me because I do not know what the right decision is. Making decisions about the future is stressful, but if each of us does it in a godly way, we can be sure that we will not make the wrong decision.

Never before have I, as a student, been given such a huge decision to make on my own. I am a senior, and that means I am nearly an adult. It is time for me to decide what is next in my future. I speak on behalf of many seniors: the task of figuring out life plans is daunting. It is true that I do not need to know all the details, but going into college unsure about my major scares me. I want to know right now and be sure, because not knowing is difficult.

As a young woman in the church, extra uncertainties factor into this problem. I have spoken to many female friends about this dilemma. I hope, Lord willing, that I get married some day and have a family. I do not plan on working after I have children, so is it prudent of me to spend time, money,
and energy on a college education? I personally am convinced that education is never a waste; knowledge leads to a deeper understanding of the creator and sustainer of this universe. Nevertheless, debt is often a side-effect of a college education, and undoubtedly great amounts of time and energy go into further education. These just add other doubts into my mind concerning the question, am I making the right decision?

Parents, ministers, and teachers have taught me that making decisions is a matter of following God’s will for my life. I know, then, that to make college decisions, I have to determine what God’s plan for my life is. This is more easily said than done. No dew will appear on fleece for any of us seniors, and the clouds will not spell out Hope College or GVSU, because this is not the way by which God reveals his will.

We may not make our decisions by following signs like these, but another very threatening method is one that the world stresses: following the heart. This method for decision-making is extremely popular in the world in which we live, and while gut instincts may have some credibility, following the heart is relying on emotion. Emotions are a blessing from God, but they, as part of all our sinful natures, are often temporary, overwhelming, and misleading. Emotions lead people to make rash judgments and do things they have not yet thought through. They are volatile, and while they may help us decide what we want, they do not show us what God wants.

The weightiest reason not to follow the heart, however, is found in Proverbs 28:26, which reads, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.” I, along with my class, have to make a decision about what is next; if I follow my heart, I am a fool. To be called a fool by the Bible’s definition is frightening. Fools despise wisdom (Prov. 1:7), they say there is no God (Ps. 53:1), and they mock at sin (Prov. 14:9). Fools in scripture are more than clumsy laughingstocks; they are wicked.

We cannot trust our hearts to make decisions, but we must use wisdom. Graciously God promises wisdom to anyone who asks for it: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given” (James 1:5). When we knock, we will be answered, and when we seek wisdom, we will find it (Matt. 7:7). We find this wisdom through prayer; at this uncertain time in life, it is crucial that we continue in prayer, searching after wisdom to know God’s will. Solomon speaks to his son in Proverbs 2 about searching after knowledge. “Incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Prov. 2:2–6). We cannot gain wisdom passively; as God’s children, we grow in knowledge of him, of his ways, and of his desires. Paul tells Timothy that God’s word is the source of wisdom (2 Tim. 3:15). To gain the wisdom necessary to make a God-centered decision, we have to ask God for the wisdom and search it out in the Bible.

In his word God gives commands as to how he desires his people to glorify him in every stage of their lives. When I look in the Scriptures for those commands, I find my calling: love God and love the neighbor. Paul also speaks fondly of the way in which unmarried women can serve the Lord without distraction (1 Cor. 7:35). This includes serving the body of Christ and being involved in the activities and life of the church. This is a necessary response to salvation. Because this is my calling, I know without any doubt that whatever I do after high school must be in accordance with that. God’s plan for me will never contradict his calling for me as his child. If what I want goes against my calling, it is a good indication to myself that this is not God’s plan.

After we know what God requires of us as his children, we can each examine ourselves. We should acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses, what we do and do not enjoy doing, and advice others give us. The circumstances in our lives at the time of an important decision can assist in showing us the right choice to make; while these are not the Urim and Thummim-type signs of the Old Testament, they guide us in the way that is right at the time.

Knowing all this, the next obstacle to overcome is trust. This is something that I know I will struggle with as I make more concrete decisions. God has promised me that he will lead me and will guide me in the right path; “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death” (Ps. 48:14). Even if the path that God leads me down does not seem to have been the correct one from an
I am a senior in high school struggling with figuring out what I want to do after graduation. The uncertainty causes great amounts of stress for me. I want to know what I will be doing in the future. I want to know so that I can be more in control of my life; it is difficult for me to not be sure. However, I am at a point in this journey that I know the only thing left to do is see where God leads me. I have chosen not to stress about it anymore because I am completely sure that I am going to be okay because of God’s providential and ruling hand. What a weight it is off my shoulders actively to realize that God is taking care of me and leading the path for my life! He promises to “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79). This peace comes when I no longer worry about being in control, but give it up to God to take care of in his most perfect and loving way. “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isa. 42:16).

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the preaching of the word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon God’s name, and to contribute to the relief of the poor. We are blessed to participate in God’s bringing forth of the gospel and his care of the poor by the way of giving. The Catechism properly notes that correct Sabbath observance has implication for the way we live every other day of the week. Our Sunday worship directs our life Monday through Saturday. Likewise, our everyday life is characterized by a concern and provision for the care of the poor and the maintenance of the ministry of the gospel and the schools.

In our concern for kingdom causes, we ought to understand what the causes are. It is a common practice for the council of a congregation to publish its collection schedule annually. Have a look through one of these schedules and you’ll see they all pertain to those causes identified in Q&A 103. Do you see collections for the Christian school that the children of your congregation attend, perhaps other Christian schools also? You’ll surely see budget or general fund collections. This cause is the means by which we operate our congregation. From paying the electric and water bills for the church building to providing for the physical needs of the minister and his family, these relate directly to the maintenance of the ministry of the gospel. Likewise, collections for the building fund, evangelism, domestic and foreign missions all surround the work of bringing God’s word. How about the benevolence or charity fund collection? This is how we provide for the care of the poor. These funds are collected by the deaconate to minister the mercies of Christ to those he has placed in need.

Are there any collections for which you don’t understand the cause? Do you know what causes you support with your Sunday School, catechism, or Bible study collections? Investigate; ask your parents, your instructor, your study leader. We should give with understanding just as we pray with understanding, so that our giving is truly an act of worship.

What attributes should characterize our giving? When we worship God in our giving, we submit ourselves to him. That means we put the kingdom causes above and before our own. Proverbs 3:9 teaches us, “honor the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase”. We ought to plan to give and reserve a portion of our increase at the outset. We also submit ourselves to God by giving liberally or freely. We should give in an amount that shows we trust God and rely on him to supply our future needs. This is the lesson of Matthew 6:19–34 and Malachi 3:10–12. Finally, we ought to give cheerfully, as Paul wrote unto the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9. If giving to kingdom causes seems a burden or objectionable, we’re not really putting God’s will before our own.

Practically our giving develops with age. As young children, our parents provide us a piece of money to put in the collection plate at the Sunday worship services so that we may participate in that aspect of the worship service. When we are entrusted with an allowance for doing household chores or earn a bit for babysitting, mowing lawns, or the like, we can begin to bring something of our own money to these same collections under our parents’ supervision. As we grow into teenage years and take on summer jobs or part-time work, we are entrusted with more independence and more resources. This is a good time to learn good stewardship and good habits in giving to support kingdom causes. When we make confession of faith and become full members of the church, we also take on a greater responsibility in the financial support of the congregation in which we are a member. Confessing members who are high school or college students may not be called upon to contribute toward the church budget of their congregation, but we should have an understanding of the budget and give as we are able in the place God has put us.

As children and young people, we may think that our giving is not important or notable because we aren’t able to give very much. But remember the lesson of the widow who gave two mites, as recorded in Luke 21:1–4 and Mark 12:41–44. The widow cast only two pennies into the treasury, but she gave with a spirit that put God and his kingdom before herself. She cast in all she had. The Lord saw her heart. He knew what she had done. He noticed. May God in his grace give us the spirit to do likewise.

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Antithetical Walk

My neighbor and I set out one day
To travel the road of life;
The path was wide and beautiful—
Sunshine and gladness were rife.

Onward we journeyed, then saw on our path
An old man, tired and ill,
Unable to gather strength to get
To the inn at the crest of the hill.

My neighbor rushed past with never a glance,
But I knew what my Master would say:
“As Thou hast done it to the least,”
Yea, Lord, I will obey.

Then past the hill my neighbor paused
In a valley cool and green.
But ere I approached it, a fork in the road
Led me to a different scene.

A sign-post had shown that the path labeled “Pleasure”
Led to that valley so fair,
And the pathway to heaven was rock-strewn and hard,
But my Lord was awaiting me there.

So mile after mile the bright way he chose
And his pathway was pleasing to see;
While mine was beset with trials and cares—
Yet through all, God was strengthening me.

And then as I watched, his path was a slide;
Down he plunged—Satan’s pathway so dire—
He could see where the road led, and fain would he stop
But its end was unquenchable fire!

My road still was hard, but I viewed through the clouds
An unspeakably beautiful sight:
The reward of the righteous, the gift of God’s grace,
The land where the Lamb is the Light!
BAPTISMS
“...that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us...the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives.”

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Alyssa Grace and Madelyn Joy, twin daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Tanya Huizing—Edmonton, CAN
Danica Reece, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Seth & Betsy VanRee—Faith, MI
Ryan Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Joy denHartog—Faith, MI
Olivia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Ericka Pastoor—First, MI
Emory Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jim & Caitlin Westing—Georgetown, MI
Emily Carolyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John & Ashley Cleveland—Hope, MI
Hendrickus Johannes, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Nieuwenkamp—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Joseph Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Wierenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Bryanna Lynne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Michelle Dykstra—Peace, IL

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Bos—Grace, MI
Mr. Gord Tolsma and Miss Rebecca Koole—Hope, MI
Mr. Les Barnhill and Mrs. Bev Kuiper—Trinity, MI

Across
2. The instrument of the shepherd’s authority is his _______.
5. The instrument the shepherd uses to keep his sheep close is his _______.
6. The sheep in the story falls into a ________.

Down
1. “Thy rod and thy staff they ________ me.”
3. The shepherd in the story protects the sheep from a ________.
4. The sheep in the story is walking up a ________.
The young sheep trudged up the dark valley. The other sheep told him they were going toward a mountain pasture with lush, green grass, but his hooves ached so much that he wanted to stop right there and never move again. Why did the journey have to be so long? It was a nice enough spot right there in the shade of the twisting valley walls.

The sheep glanced at his shepherd walking a few yards away. The shepherd’s staff, a slender pole with a crook at one end, clacked on the stones in rhythm with his strides. In his right hand, he carried his rod, a thick stick with a wooden club on the end.

Perhaps the shepherd wouldn’t notice if the sheep wandered away from the path to nibble on that green leaf that poked between the rocks. The sheep stepped away from the others and opened his mouth to bite the leaf.

The shepherd’s rod thunked into the ground in front of the sheep and squished the plant. “Don’t eat that. It isn’t good for you,” the shepherd told the sheep. The shepherd nudged the sheep back onto the path with his staff.

For a few minutes, the young sheep stayed on the path. But another flash of green caught his eye. This one was farther off the path, but it looked green and tasty. The sheep wanted to eat it. He wandered away from the others and trotted toward the patch of green.

The rocks shifted beneath him. The sheep cried out as he fell into a crevice in the rocks. The crevice was black like night. The sheep couldn’t see anything but the patch of sky above him.

Something hissed in the darkness. A snake! The sheep froze in fright. He shouldn’t have wandered off the path!

The snake coiled, then struck at him. Before the snake could bite him, the shepherd’s rod flew through the air. The club end knocked the snake’s head away.

The crook of the shepherd’s staff hooked around the sheep’s body and hauled him out of the black crevice. The sheep trembled at his close call. He tried to trot away in shame, but the shepherd’s rod blocked his way. The sheep lowered his head in front of his shepherd.

The shepherd knelt and parted the sheep’s wool with his staff. When he’d finished checking the sheep for injuries, he gently nudged the sheep back onto the path.

As they started walking once again, the shepherd leaned his staff against the sheep’s side. The sheep trotted along, content to walk beside his shepherd and comforted with the touch of the shepherd’s staff. He knew he’d be safe as long as his shepherd carried his rod and his staff.

**Questions to think about:**

1. Read Psalm 23:4 by yourself or with your parents. A shepherd’s rod is the symbol of his strength and authority, while his staff is his means to keep his sheep close to him. How are we comforted by both our heavenly shepherd’s rod and staff?

2. Read Exodus 7:8–13 and Ezekiel 20:37 by yourself or with your parents. What do these passages mean when they use the word rod? Why is that important?
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“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” 1 Peter 5:8